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Itkin's Story: A Contradictory Web

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By MARTIN ARNOLD

Herbert Itkin, Government informer, so far has brought down two very big men, James L. Marcus, former city commissioner and one-time confidant of Mayor Lindsay, and Carmine G. De Sapio, once one of the most powerful political leaders in the nation.

So when he thinks back over the bizarre and sometimes fancy-woven fabric of his life, it is with the satisfaction of seeing himself, above all as "a patriot."

Slight, hollow-eyed and sawlow, living in fear of his life in protective custody at an undisclosed military installation base here, Mr. Itkin has emerged from the double-dealing world of the informer insisting that he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. This is true. He has sworn that he was an informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and this, too, is true.

In the shadows and thickets in which the government police and intelligence agencies work, Herbert Itkin, the obscure, money-grabbing 43-year-old lawyer, was known by the C.I.A. code name "Portio" and by the F.B.I. as "Mr. Jerry."

For the C.I.A. he was a voluntary supplier of political information, particularly about Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Indonesia.

His value to the F.B.I. was summed up by an agent who said: "He is probably the most important informer ever to come to the surface. He knew the younger up-and-coming characters in the Cosa Nostra."

A member on the staff of United States Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau who helped in the prosecution of the Marcus case said that "Itkin is the most valuable informer the F.B.I. has ever had outside the espionage field. He never lied to us. His information was always accurate."

Behind his role as a witness in court is a labyrinthine and sometimes farcical story. It has been pieced together during the last year from court records and secret

interviews here and in Washington, Europe and the Caribbean, with Mr. Itkin, his friends, enemies, relatives, business associates and Federal and local officials.

In addition to his information on Marcus and De Sapio, testimony supplied by Mr. Itkin has led to the arrest and conviction of Antonio (Tony Ducks) Corallo, a Mafia chief; Henry Fried, a millionaire contractor, and Daniel J. Motto, a Queens bakery union president.

He has been the principal witness in a pension fund kickback case involving the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, in which two men were sentenced to prison and a third given a suspended sentence.

Information could produce an additional 30 cases involving labor racketeering, gambling, bribery, income tax evasion and a wide range of other felonies, authorities say. Generating and bragging has embarrassed the C.I.A.

His theatrical attempts to force the agency to help straighten out his domestic problems almost blew the cover of one of the C.I.A.'s most important operatives in New York City, the lawyer who was Itkin's C.I.A. "control."

He also had a tendency to embark on wild and illegal schemes that were beyond his activities as an informer.

Evidence of such activity in which Mr. Itkin kept for himself large sums of money from bribes, kickbacks and swindles, came during the De Sapio trial, which ended on Saturday when De Sapio was found guilty of conspiracy to bribe Marcus and extort contracts from Consolidated Edison.

William A. Vericker, an F.B.I. agent who worked with Mr. Itkin, was asked if it was the policy of the bureau "to permit people such as Itkin to retain the proceeds of crime."

Mr. Vericker answered: "No it is not the policy of our office. In Itkin's case he often—most of the time—told me about these deals after they had been completed and he said he disbursed the proceeds."

Federal officials, while declining to elaborate on how they tried to restrain Mr. Itkin, said they had no choice but to keep him under surveillance.

and squandered ran into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Mr. Itkin's operations also caused a serious rupture in the relationship between the offices of United States Attorney Morgenthau and Manhattan District Attorney Frank S. Hogan.

"They [Mr. Hogan's office] would love to get me on a perjury conviction to destroy me and all my work," he said in an interview. He has four other cases pending against him by the Manhattan District Attorney.

A member of Mr. Hogan's staff asked: "How could the Federal officials allow an informer to take that kind of money, which was admittedly made from criminal deals, and keep it? What do they think informers are? Some sort of bounty hunters?"

Mr. Hogan's office believes that the Federal prosecutors went to court with Mr. Itkin's testimony before they had their cases really proved.

Mr. Morgenthau's office, on the other hand, says that the District Attorney did not move fast enough, and that is why Mr. Hogan's office is trying to discredit Mr. Itkin. Moreover, Federal attorneys add, Mr. Hogan routinely grants immunity to his own informers.

Federal authorities, perhaps because Mr. Itkin is their man, paint a heroic picture. They praise him for his "guts," for "risking his neck almost every day" and for his "reckless patriotism," which, they insist, has earned Mr. Itkin the right to across-the-board immunity. In Mr. Hogan's office, he is referred to as "the germ."

"I have lived years of deceit and lies and danger for my country," said Mr. Itkin in the interview. Striving in his singular way for status, he bragged of his undercover work despite the obvious risks.

"Herbie told just about everybody about the C.I.A. and F.B.I. He told some fellows he commuted on the train with," his first wife said.

And when he ran out of people to brag to, when his life as an informer did not conform to his fantasy, he turned to writing fiction. Some stories were pornographic and others were spy tales in which Herbert Itkin was the hero.

A Spy Thriller

In one such story, written in July 1968 and entitled "The Illusions: (Missile Espionage—Mafia)," Bret is the hero who, Mr. Itkin said, is himself. The character, David Emanuel, a lawyer, is Bret's C.I.A. chief. One portion reads:

"Bret was such an outgoing young man, yet before this desk, he became shy

and reticent. Emanuel recognized and understood the motivation. It was not he, Emanuel, as a person, but he, as a symbol of the authority of their country that Bret revered.

"When a man is a true patriot, when he has made the decision to offer his life for his country, he then only has those in authority to relate to as his basis of honor and integrity. To Bret, then, David Emanuel represented the symbol of the absolute National Authority."

How did Herbert Itkin miss becoming Bret, the professional secret agent of his dreams? Or did he miss entirely?

The answer begins in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn, where he and a sister spent their childhood and early adult years in a neat, two-family house at 1748 48th Street. In those days the area was middle-class, although the Itkins were not. Mr. Itkin's father, Arthur, made a modest living from various shopkeeping ventures.

Arthur Itkin "seemed rather weak," a boyhood friend of Herbert's remembered, but his mother, Edith, was the opposite. She was overreaching by living in the neighborhood, but (like the mother of James Marcus, the man her son was to befriend and betray) she was strong-willed, talkative, inventive and ambitious.

"The Itkins were Jewish like most of the other people around them," the boyhood friend said. "But they weren't religious. At Christmastime they had a tree, the only one on the block."

Herbert is remembered as a reasonably good student at New Utrecht High School, where he was on the swimming team.

Enlisted in Army

In 1944, he enlisted in a special United States Army training program for high school students and after V-J day was sent to northern Japan with a field hospital unit. Later, he said that he was a paratrooper attached to Army intelligence.

Returning home in 1946, young Itkin invested his Army savings—about \$2,000—in a small luncheonette in Brooklyn's Bush Terminal. Herbert and his parents planned to work together and make a success of the place.

One Saturday evening, Mr. Itkin recalls, his father did not come home from the late shift at the luncheonette. He has told at least two versions to friends and associates of what happened.

According to one account, he went to the luncheonette "the

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